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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON THE ISRAELI PULLOUT FROM THE GAZA
STRIP

NEA/PPD FOR AFERNANDEZ

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, called the "liberation of Gaza" by many, received widespread coverage in all media. Most newspapers ran factual accounts. Official papers, however, including government daily Al Thawra (circulation 40,000), highlighted the official view that withdrawal is a step forward in establishing peace in the region, but assumed bad intentions on the part of Israel with respect to both the West Bank and Jerusalem. Officials of various political parties and party-affiliated media outlets saw withdrawal as evidence of the effectiveness of resistance and called for continued resistance until the remainder of "the occupied territories are liberated." Politicians and commentators generally welcomed the withdrawal, but depicted it as a victory for the "legitimate" force of resistance. Most of the credit for the withdrawal has been attributed to Hamas's attacks, "which drove the occupiers out of Gaza." End Summary

12. (U) Media outlets most frequently referred to "the liberation of Gaza" when reporting on it commenced on August 15. Government media outlets, including Al Thawra (08/16), Yemen State TV (08/15), and the Saba News Agency (the most frequently used news source for all Yemeni media) (08/15), reported President Ali Abdullah Saleh's telephone conversation with Palestinian President Abbas, and his congratulating Abbas and hoping that withdrawal would be "a step forward in the course of a full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories."

13. (U) In an editorial published August 16, Al Thawra opined that the Gaza withdrawal can be seen both as the result of pressures exerted by Palestinian resistance and of the economic burden of maintaining and protecting Israeli settlements in Gaza more than it can be viewed as an indicator of Israeli interest in peace. Headlines of news and opinion in some government newspapers read: "Purification of Gaza from the filth of occupation;" "A new proof from Gaza: Israel withdraws only under (the pressure of) resistance;" and, "If only withdrawal doesn't turn out to be a trap!"

14. (U) Opposition newspapers and the website (www.Alsahwa-yemen.net) of Al Sahwa (08/18), site of the main opposition Islah party, and weekly Al Wahdawi (08/17), mouthpiece of the opposition Nasserite party (circulation 12,000), welcomed the withdrawal and portrayed it as a meager victory for resistance after "four decades of occupation." All media urged the Palestinians "to carry on the path of resistance that deprives Israel of the sense of security until all other territories are liberated." Opposition media underscored the reactions of Palestinians in Yemen including those of the office directors of the Hamas and Fatah resistance, who argue in favor of resistance as an effective way of securing freedom.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: The Yemeni man in the streets is heavily influenced by the portrayal of the withdrawal offered by the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, and the preachers in local mosques. Generally, the prevailing impression is resistance brought about the withdrawal; however, there is skepticism about Israel's long-term intention and many voice their suspicions that Israel might reoccupy Gaza, "devour" the rest of the West Bank and Jerusalem, or execute a plan to "purge the intifada." In sum, the view that withdrawal came about as the result of resistance has strengthened the belief that resistance must be supported and should continue. End comment.

KRAJESKI